THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI DINSHA J. PATEL): (a) to (d) No, Sir. There is no restriction for release of new LPG connections for genuine domestic customers, including women under Below Poverty Line (BPL) in the country. Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) have released Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) connections to BPL familes, including women, as per requests recevied/Schemes launched in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Union Territory of Puducherry. The security deposits for the equipment in such cases have been borne by the respective State Governments. However, there is no separate allocation for women in these schemes.

OMCs have introduced 5 kg domestic LPG cylinders with effect from August 2002 in order to meet the demand of low-income groups in urban, semi-urban and rural pockets and also extend the reach of LPG to the hilly terrain and interior areas in the country on account of convenience in transportation.

Government have given freedom to OMCs to set up LPG distributorships in accordance with their commercial assessment and locations are identified by them on the basis of available refill sale potential for sustaining an independent distributorship. Government have advised OMCs to draw up Marketing Plan for covering semi-urban and rural areas. OMCs have finalized 1340 locations in the country for setting up of new LPG distributorship mainly in rural and urban-rural (semi-urban) locations. The advertisements for the same have been released.

Foreign exchange earnings from tourists

3829. SHRI JESUDASU SEELAM: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether due to quality of method of calculation, foreign exchange earnings from tourists have been under estimated in the last three years;

(b) whether this has resulted in under valuation of the contribution of Tourism Department to the exchequer;

(c) whether according to the revised calculations, India earned US$ 9.6 billion from foreign tourists till November, 2007;

(d) whether to correct anomaly, the Ministry adopted a new methodology and used Consumer Price Index figures instead of wholesale Price Index being used now;

(e) what is the latest earnings from tourism; and

(f) what steps considered to improve the tourist earnings further?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRIMATI KANTI SINGH): (a) to (e) The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) gives preliminary quarterly estimates of Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from tourism with a time lag of 3 months and provisionally revised estimates with a time lag of about 6 months. However, Ministry of Tourism (MOT) prepares monthly advance estimate of FEE from tourism with a time lag of one week.

The methodology earlier followed for estimating the FEE from tourism for a particular month was based on the following main inputs:—

(i) A norm of FEE per visitor from Bangladesh and Pakistan;

(ii) The ratio of FEE per visitor from countries other than Bangladesh and Pakistan; and

(iii) Total number of foreign tourist arrivals in that month.

The ratio of FEE per visitor from countries other than Bangladesh and Pakistan was derived using the FEE data from the RBI, but had not been updated using the latest estimates from RBI. This resulted in significant variation between the estimates of FEE from tourism given by the MOT and the RBI.

In the revised methodology currently being used, the old norms of FEE per visitor from Bangladesh and Pakistan have been done away with. Further, the revised methodology uses the latest provisionally revised estimates of FEE from tourism available from the RBI. Another improvement in the new methodology is the use of Consumer Price Index (Urban Non-Manual Employees) in place of Wholesale Price Index to adjust for inflation.

As per the new methodology, the FEE from tourism in India during 2007 is estimated at US$ 11.62 billion.

(f) The steps taken by the Government to further promote tourism and improve FEE from tourism include:—

* Focusing on growth of hotel infrastructure, particularly that for budget hotels;
* Enhancing connectivity through augmentation of air capacity and improving road infrastructure to major tourist attractions;
* Direct approach to the consumers through electronic and print media through the "Incredible India" Campaign;
* Production and distribution of publicity material;
* Direct co-operative marketing with the airlines, tour operators and and wholesalers in overseas markets;
* According greater focus to the emerging markets, paricularly of China, North East Asia and South East Asia;
* Participation in Trade Fairs and Exhibitions;
* Use of internet and web marketing; and
* Re-inforced hospitality programmes including grant of air passages to invite media personnel, tour operators on familiarization tours to India to get first hand knowledge on various tourism product.

Overseas tourists

3830. DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether to attract overseas tourists who skip India as a destination due to lack of time, Centre is working on sprucing up infrastructure at 20 destinations and circuits that can be considered by visitors within 3 to 4 days;

(b) whether while addressing a cultural event that was part of the Incredible India celebrations in Singapore, she urged potential tourists to consider India for shorter holidays; and